The LONG LEASH

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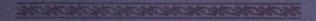
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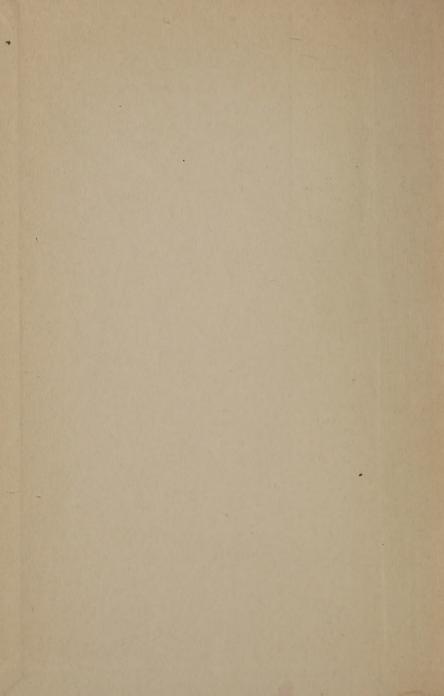
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The Long Leash

JESSICA NELSON NORTH

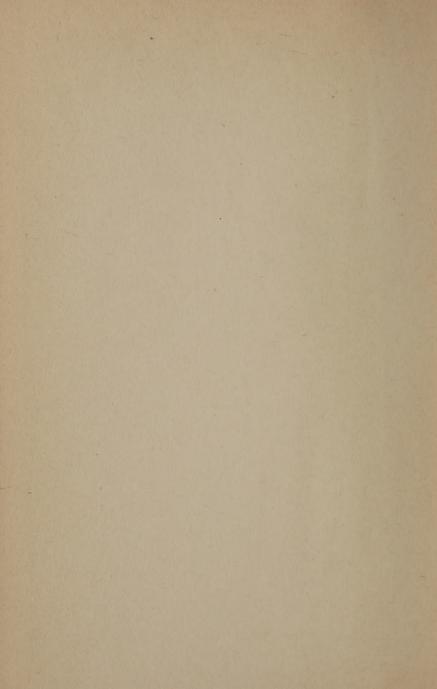


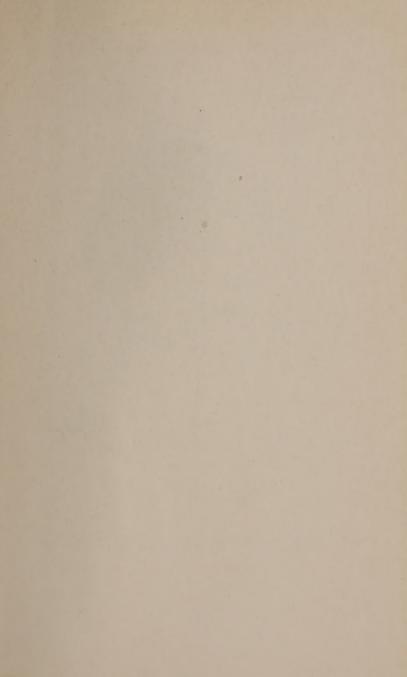


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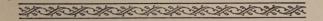
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The Long Leash

By JESSICA NELSON NORTH

WITH SKETCH PORTRAIT OF THE AUTHOR BY
G. W. RUSSELL (Æ)



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LOST ACRE

Here nothing flourishes Save burr and bottom-weed. Never any kindly seed The sour clod nourishes.

The brown bees hurtle over,
Bruising their wings on dusty stalk
and stem;
The bluet and meadow clover
Have heed of them
And come no nearer than the garden's
hem.

Yet will I build my house
On this sad plot of mine,
With hedge-row and garden-close,
Large leaves and little leaves,
Swallows under the eaves,
Creepers and columbine.

For my life was a bare land Watered by no springs,
That changes under your hand
To a fertile and fair land
With green and blossomy things
And a flutter of young wings.

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I



THE LONG LEASH

Ţ

MOONLIGHT walks abroad in the world alone On spidery limbs that reach to any height. He is more than God. He is known Where God is quite forgot. For who would say to the moon 'Depart. Lay not your white Fingers upon this spot In my heart'?

And where he last has been he never tells
Nor why he comes to us with harried pace,
Nor what he has seen that he dwells
So long with us to rest
On my calm breast and your strong, sleeping
face.

Your hand is on my wrist.

Your dreams lean toward me with your quiet breath.

Oh you

Are more than any magic since you slew The stark and grinning giant of my doubt. Now on the long leash of your certain faith Let me go out Adventuring in midnight with the moon.

II

In the still courtyard with the cobbled floor A man's quick footstep — a half-opened door, A woman's angry laugh whetted by pain To stillness and a door that closed again.

'And so you thought to divide the night between us,
Astarte and Venus?
I thank you, no.
Impartial as you are
Thus far
My hard-pressed communism will not go.
A lover is the thing I will not share.'

Let us, O moonlight, reconstruct the scene, Acting it over for our pleasure alone, Not, let us say, from knowledge that we own But as it might have been.

The moon was heavy on the world that night And my young heart was heavy in my breast. The trees were bent beneath their burden of light. My burden was too ponderous a weight
And would not let me rest.
You came late — late —
And my long hours of doubt
Hardened to sureness at your debonair
Light footstep on the stair.
It was good for you there was no knife about.
I would have paid for the lesson I had learned
With the hard coinage of steel.
I would have turned
The embedded blade, I would have laughed to
feel

The fibres shrink and start.

You know that a year ago I was a child, Headlong in anger, melting at your kiss. I start back from the mirror, seeing myself like this, A woman, bitter and wild.

Indeed, indeed, I know
How delicate a phantom you pursue.
The hallmarks of her virtue all are there.
Pale opal eyes that stare
Wide open on your passion, pale curling hair
Fine as a baby's, a pale negative mind?
Amid whose placid shallows you seem to find
Something too sweet for eyes like mine to see,

Something too precious for me ever to know, And pray what was it that you found in me A year or more ago?

I have no pity for myself, I say, Though all my youth lies trampled under heel.

Something is in me that you cannot slay, Fibre of courage, strong as tempered steel.

I grieve for your new-piquéd appetite Seeking its latest food. I pity her who sees in you to-night Her god, misunderstood.

III

Come away, moon, what profit have we here Along these sterile byways of the mind? There comes a freshened odor on the wind Out of another year.

Wind, sweet with the warm and restless lake,

Be content with the waves, stroke their hair, Smooth down their glistening bodies, make Their white limbs tremble under the living, bare,

Strong pressure of your hands.

Play with the sands,
Stirring their crystals into formless pools.
But climb no farther up the viny bank,
Disturb no foliage discreetly woven,
Nor part the secret boughs of any tree,
Nor drive the asters from their stalwart ranks
Around our dusky haven,
Nor let the curious moonlight through to see
Where breathless on the warmly breathing
earth

Something has birth Older than moonlight, stronger than the wind.

What if we never find
A surer formula for life than this
That lies in beating blood and mingled breath?
What if a kiss
Prove the most potent remedy for death?
What if the blind,
Laboring, futile tendrils of the mind
One on the other, intricately turning,
Lie at the end
Raked up with dust like autumn leaves for burning?

For surely grass is troubled less than we, And nearer to the mystery of living. Surely our blood is bitter as the sea With too much talk of getting and of giving. Surely the asters reap from loamy soil More harvest for their toil.

This is man's sorrow:
That even his most vital act of all
Comes not unheralded by mental pain,
With thoughts of yesterday and of to-morrow
Criss-crossing through his brain;
That even his most exquisite embrace
Brings back again
Another voice — another lifted face.
Memory, memory,
Leave us alone to-night, and let us be
Part of the fruitage of this friendly hill.

Be still, be still, Pass by above us on the moonlit road With your unwelcome load.

And all you brood of foresight and misgiving,
Pass by.

This is our time for living.

IV

'Whiten the steeple,' drones the solemn bell, 'O Moon, in honor of your Lord and King.'

What story could the lofty steeple tell That craves your whitening? It stares at heaven with a single eye, Bearing its golden cross against the sky.

Within, the priest in sacrificial dress
Sets out the wine and bread,
Or with his people murmurs formal mass
For one a season dead,
And everywhere that pious human hand
Might zealously embroider or emboss
On stole and chasuble and chalice-stand,
The cross, the cross, the cross.

Wan features of the young, tormented Jew, Always before us, stiffening in death, We have contrived an ornament of you, Have woven patterns of your thorny wreath, Embalmed your agony in wood and stone, And made convention of your dying breath.

This is their lot, O Jesus, who forsake Mallet and chisel, and the ductile, yellow, Firm-fibred wood. This is their lot who lightly cast aside Molding of matter, and the craftsman's

pride, This is their lot who take Upon their hearts the pangs of brotherhood, Who call to fishers by the briny lake To rise and follow A dream, half understood.

Brave carpenters of Thought, you who exchange

Your pine and cedar for the shifting, strange Timber wherein the living sap still flows, Mortise your joints and shape your corners true,

Rivet your bands.

Mark well your hammer blows, steel upon steel,

Against that final moment when you feel The nails that pierce your hands.

V

This man was a century old to-day,
A shell in which a little life still lingers.
He lies
Quietly in his bed, and who can say,
Watching his sunken eyes,
Whether he sleeps or wakes?

He makes A murmuring little sound and takes Folds of the coverlet between his fingers. Last April, when his only son lay dead At eighty years, they brought The old man in to hear the service read, But no one knew what he thought.

I have seen him in the fall
Holding an early apple to his cheek,
Looking as though he were about to
speak
Of something he could never quite recall.

Ten years ago he still could putter about,
Peer at the garden flowers, sit in the sun,
Smile at his great-great-grandchild, trying
to run

On legs no less uncertain than his own.

Sometimes his great-granddaughter, bringing out

His cushion, chatted in a cheerful tone.

Tradition clings to-day
About him, like the tales a dealer tells
About his ancient harpsichord or chair.
He had a house they say,
Down in Connecticut, or somewhere else,
It hardly matters where.
A cottage sort of house, friendly and low,
Such as they built a hundred years ago.

There on a slope of sunny meadow ground He set an orchard out, The finest one for forty miles around.

It grew and grew, and with it grew his pride. He was not prouder of his fields of corn, He was not prouder when he won his bride, Nor when his son was born.

Jonathans, Wealthies, and the hardy flush Of Winesap, and the gold of Tolman Sweet. Russet and Seek-no-further, Maiden Blush, And which were best to cook, and which to eat, Snow apples, perishing like early snow, He knew them all — but that was years ago.

Sometimes in early fall
They put a fragrant apple in his hands
But no one knows whether he understands
Or what he thinks at all.

VI

Now Moon, if constancy you prize, Here is the wife you seek, whose icy eyes Stare in the mirror at her powdered cheek.

A faithful wife, she will not stoop to any Wayside Endymion.

Her thoughts, lawful and nice, Are all on auction for the public penny, She walks precise, Trim-footed to a passionless Paradise.

A constant ewe,
She needs no pen nor tether,
She will not stray no matter
Who may endear her.
Prudence, the old bell-wether
Ambles too near her.

'Ding-dong, ding-dong,' with clatter Comfortable enough, 'Come all ye faithful, gather At the feeding-trough.'

VII

O Moon, if you must shine on him to-night, Show me his hands; I know his face by heart. The days are past when heavy-lidded eyes Or subtle lips that hint of mysteries Could make my pulses start.

The days are gone when smiling reticence Was loved for its own sake, Alluring barrier on which to break Pose and pretense.

A wall is now, whatever it may hide,
A wall and nothing more.
I would not take, to pry his guarded door,
One step aside.
I haunt no more such corridors by night,
For since I climbed this one, compelling stair,
The world has broken on me with a light
Almost too great to bear.

Yet for his hands' sake will I still concede Whatever inner beauties he contains, Remembering their slim, prehensile length, Their cruel strength, Remembering creative fires that feed Their branching veins.

Remembering his hands, that speak a creed His lips deny, I can Concede a certain beauty in the man.

VIII

Morning comes on and you will soon awake, The moonlight dwindles, Out of the east, over the rousing lake A gray day kindles.

There will be wind to-day — and every gust Will stir a whirlpool in the shining road,

Dust in the wind, and sunlight on the dust,

Kites in the wind, and little boys at play, Life will go strongly forward as it must; And you and I will follow, close behind, Sailing our hearts upon the summer wind, Hailing the fortunes of another day.

A PROMISE

Time will have its way —
Time, patiently moving —
Water in quiet weather
Grinding together
The hard stones of our loving.

Sharp stones that now we tread With pierced, ecstatic feet, Will all be round and sweet.

Some day
Our lives that cried and bled,
Will lie down together
Like waves in quiet weather,
In a smooth, cool bed.

THE SLEEPER

Night

O HEAVY breather in the surf of sleep,
What is that strange and rosy slenderness
You hold against your heart with so much
tenderness?

The Sleeper

It is my wife I hold —
I love her more than life.
She has hair of bronze and gold,
And in twin strands divides it;
It lies across her bosom surplice-wise.
This I know to be true though darkness hides
it.

Night

Now all things false dissolve beneath the moon! This is a sheaf of whispering dreams you hold, Bound by the tawny sinews of your arm.

They nod together with plumes of bronze and gold,

They breathe and are warm; They speak together in a sibilant tune.

The Sleeper

It is my own wife. Her mouth, that is merry and wise, Is shut; and the lids are shut that cover Her faithful eyes.

Night

A sheaf of dreams — hush!

The First Dream

She is untrue,
Brother and brother!
This one is new —
Where is the other?

The Second Dream

I hear men say He had ceased to love her. Even to-day His voice can move her.

The Third Dream

I have seen her tremble When she meets his eyes. She is deft with lies, She is quick to dissemble.

The Fourth Dream

How is this done, Brother and brother, To sleep with one And dream of another? Night

A sheaf of dreams, of dreams...

The Sleeper

My wife. My wife.

EXCHANGE

Be satisfied with me
That put away for you
Under this flawless grain the mobile tree —
The tree that knew
Black, roofless nights and warm,
Fine rain at winter's leaving,
And wet, hushed interweaving
Of branches in the storm.

Of that rough, windy ending
You have no more to fear.

Now the unseasoned shriek of fibres rending
Will not distress your ear.

What did you seek?

I can be cool and sleek,
Pliant and bending —
I can be still or speak

In mellow notes or thin, Piccolo, violin — or what you will.

But never ask again The sound of leaves in rain.

LULLABY

It is a restless child,
This vain love I bore him.
Before cock-crow
It wakens and is wild
Clamoring for him.

Hush and lullaby
Child in whom I hope not!
Night is still in the sky
And the dawn flowers open not.
Lullaby!

Hush, and give me peace! At my heart's core wailing. It is unavailing, Cease! He will come no more.

AMBUSH

Wно would crouch with me at the fountainhead

Of lost lakes in the dusk of rainy springs? When the dark air is shrill with wheeling wings

And white on marshy shores untenanted The ice breaks.

Who would follow the shining teal to bed,
Or green drakes in a thicket of rustling reeds,
Where the wild rice sprouts from the thawing
seeds

And gulls wheel And the ice breaks

And the lone crane feeds at the fountain-head Of lost lakes?

BOATMAN

BOATMAN, leaning on your pole on the Secret River,

Will you tarry for a soul who never knew a lover?

She is very young and cold, her beauty makes me shiver.

I will give you coins of gold to take her softly over.

TO THE MAN WHO LOVES TWILIGHT

Why do you go along the street caressing with quiet eyes

Gray walls, bleak houses, and the dull wet skies?

Have all things gray your blessing?

We do not love your twilight, God and I.

He pelts the rainy heaven

With gorgeous autumn — hangs the dripping

trees

With yellow apples of Hesperides In lines

Sweetly uneven.

Loops every sodden fence with scarlet vines....

And where you sit
Sufficient to yourself, hugging the gloom,
I prance with rustling silk and candles lit
To make an orgy in our quiet room.

NOLI ME TANGERE

Touch me not now, for I am not yet unbound From the blue-girdled robe of sleep.

Kiss me not yet while about my head the charms

Of that strange journey hover.

When you speak you dissolve a music frail and deep,

In your arms
I forget my great eternal lover

(Whose coming was as a wide door Set open in the shadow of a hill Where men went in at dusk, weary and ill And some returned no more.)

But some there are who carry in a smile The secrets of that place. Touch me not yet. Grant me a little while To think upon his face.

A SUMERIAN CYCLE

I

After the rains a crescent of sweet grass Bending toward Sumer.

After the rains

The green-white pool that ripples to the gourd,

After black skies and walls of beaten clay, Thy arms, O Siva. Tell me, O Soul, would any wise man say, Would any beggar, loafing by his wineskin Say That love like ours was not enough for

That love like ours was not enough for him?

The little tree has dropped its ripest fig Into your bosom.

III

Incense twelve times breathed is a pain Keen to the nostrils. There is no help for us in all of Sumer. Though they should feast us, Siva, in every hall,

There is no help. The clear pool sickens To our throats. The grass is rooted In weariness.

IV

Out of the south the nomads come like locusts,

Sharp eyes in dusty faces,

Sharp hooves of desert cattle,

Their rags twitter in the hot wind

Like locusts in the harvest.

Shall we fear them, O thou whom I see no longer

Through the veil of my surfeiting

After the nomads The rains.

That has covered thy face?

SONNET

Wно would have thought that eyelids could be dear,

Or anything as tangible as hands?

Who would have thought that mere material strands

Of hair could have the power to draw me near?

That shoulders with my heart could interfere, Sending out strange, imperious commands? And is there any sage who understands The pleasing convolutions of an ear?

So if I will not let you read in peace,
Because of yearnings quite beyond control,
Ponder with me what vital facts are these—
The lure of soul for flesh and flesh for soul.
And meditate how faintly lags behind
Our long-extolled supremacy of mind.

THE PROBLEM

Trees at my bedroom window Twirl their branches around, Fret their leaves together, Nod to one another, Make a bewildered sound.

Once she slept alone;
Now we see returning
Each night the tall one
Who goes away in the morning.

Once she seldom smiled; Now her songs are many. She trills like a young child With a bright new penny.

They bend their heads together, Nod and murmur and sigh, Forget the summer weather, Neglect the blue sky.

Once she sat alone; Now she looks in love On a round-eyed small one That coos like a ring-dove.

TO DUNCAN

DEATH stood beside me on your night of birth With no black accident or grim abyss, He brought a gray, pervading quietness, The moist aroma of the summer earth.

No silver invitation sought my bed Nor winding of the thin celestial horn. He offered me beneath the friendly corn A dreamless pillow for a drowsy head.

Insistent were his overtures and sweet, But somewhere still my flesh denial made, And so with fainting insolence I laid My warm and wailing challenge at his feet.

Oh, little son, assume your enterprise! Now to the years in which we have no part Carry your father's dark, endearing eyes And my unquiet heart.

LATE HARVEST

Earth has a sort of harvest for us all And with her hastens the laborious sun And sure the laws of compensation run; So if you pray for orchards in their prime Or viny shadows on your sunwise wall, Why bide your cycle, and the thing is done All in its time.

Oh my too lavish garden where I spent
Sharp hours of hunger in the April land!
Not yet my sated heart can understand
Why plenty sickens in the mouth of want,
Nor how those horny, half-forgotten seeds,
So deeply thrust into the frosty ground,
Could root and bloom and ripen and confound
My hands with harvest far beyond their
needs.





GREETING WITHOUT VOICE

Mournful of heart under the starry span Oh, cloaked and cowled in darkness, where are you going?

Midnight will make a priest of any man But joy returns before the cocks are crowing.

For when the earth hangs trembling by a thread

Out of an arc as far as Time's beginning, We walk with prayerful hearts and careful tread

Lest any wayward thought should send it spinning.

Have patience, brother, though indeed tonight

Reproach us for our vague humanity. How swiftly will the reassuring light Restore the colors of our vanity.

GIANT-KILLER

Now in the early gray Light, in the cold dew, Let me go forth to slay Giants for you.

He who has never swung Lanthorns, can never know How a stout arm and young Can slay at one blow,

Shadows of elms that fall Mile-long as the moon dies, Of turkeys on a wall With wings drooped slumber-wise.

Or the low fearsome shade Of hay-ricks in a fence angle Or the great darkness made By thorn trees, all in a tangle.

Oh they who never kill Giants, can never see How in a world so still Shadows move mightily.

A CONVENT WALK

In green seclusion and unwavering light, In larkspur-haunted leisure and dim peace They mount the blue crescendo of July. Between these walls the gay, abandoned world

Slips its impassioned pansies. Here the bold Perfume of phlox is in the saintly air And summer walks abroad.

Yet the nuns pace
Admirably along the walk
Beside the balsam bed,
Two and two, face and face,
Hands and hands,
Head and covered head,
Admirably they talk.

Why did I think too late
To compass my fragility with stone?

LEGERDEMAIN

ONCE more that bland, mysterious Signor presents us

From the voluminous sleeves of his luminous garment

Another

Pop-eyed, lop-eared, wet-nosed, wildly palpitant

Generation.

Infallible
Juggles the stars.
Now left, now right, in twisting, intricate fashion,
Pshaw! One has fallen.
It is nothing. Appear not to have seen it.

From what false thumb
Draws forth the days like parti-colored silks,
Rose, lavender and gold
And this star-spangled banner of the night!
While I,
Sadly amid the general applause,
Foresee the finish and the great salaam.

PROTEST

Sound of a hidden wind Bearing us onward — Steel of a hidden arm Urging us forward!

Let us devise
A way to look behind us,
Set our heels to the drift,
Brace our knees to the tide,
Lift our eyes.

How else shall we know Who he is that compels us, Endlessly moving, Snatches our days new-born, Hastens our loving?

As gulls in the lake-wind flying Turn, bracing their wings, Hard-driven, harshly crying, 'Who are you, O Lake-Wind, Out of the nameless places, By the dark water, Harrying winged things—?'

Suddenly turning, So let us confront him, Respite demanding.

HIBERNALIA

I HAVE a secret which you cannot share
Though you were twenty times my lover.
A citadel. You cannot enter there.
A memory you never can discover.
You ask me why I shine at any hearth,
Bask like a queen in any wayside blaze,
Yet warmth is not a part of me nor plenty,
Comfort nor cover.

I have an icy covenant with earth
And this you cannot know though you were
twenty
Times my lover.

Now is the season of frost, lovely and cruel, Taking the world in strong transparent hands, When country children gather boughs for fuel Along the bottom lands.

What do you know of frost, you who only See it out of a warm, well-lighted pane Under a roof where pigeons in the sun Chuckle and strut and coo?

Once I knew

That to be cold was to be never lonely,

That to be cold was to feel iron enter
Into your heart out of the iron ground
To hear the core of fire at the earth's center
Endlessly turning round,
To give one's body over without sound
Into the arms of winter.

I warm beside your fire and withdraw Before my dissolution is begun, As hillsides thaw And freeze and thaw beneath the cycling sun. I can survive on ears the huskers leave In stubbled cornfields when their day is finished.

I can retrieve
Roots from deserted gardens after frost.
I thrive on all things thwarted and diminished,
Abandoned and lost.

But you are sleeker than your sleekest dove, Your eyes affront me with their eagerness. Temper your love For me with meagerness.

You would not spread a dinner in the sun To coax the hungry rabbit from its burrow Who after dark Explores the beauty of the frosted furrow, Nibbles the frugal bark.

But leave outside your door in negligence Some tidbit of your passion if you will, And I will creep, charmed by indifference, Quivering to your sill.

AS ONE INVULNERABLE

I knew a man who met to-morrow With hard, indifferent repose —

Buttoned his coat about his sorrow And walked unarmed among his foes.

(For foes he has and foes a-plenty Who will not lay his wound apart, And show the world for five and twenty The crucifixion of his heart.)

He stood at his deserted window And would not set a candle there; With dagger-pointed innuendo The cheated public paused to stare,

Or boldly thrusting, fled affrighted Lest they do battle with a shade, When through his sinews, unrequited, Whistled the sharp, offensive blade.

BODY BELEAGUERED

TEMPLE of God, in vain despoilers sought you In that far house where pleasure was your master,

Before the image of an old disaster Sped us abroad.

See to how stark a hiding I have brought you, Footweary of your weight, Divinest freight.

Here, in our doubtful stronghold of the rocks, We watch the torn sky graying Toward the equinox, While distant echoes with autumnal baying Scare us to cover like the frightened fox.

Now, sore beset,
We share the portion of the starveling sparrow
Or, suppliant, crouch at the squirrel's board.
Oh farther yet
Into what meager fortress must I bear you,
Ark of my cloudy and diminished Lord?

ADVICE TO YOUNG LOVERS

Oн, make no love beside a waterfall!
Whatever there is about a kiss that matters
Careens and shatters on the rocky wall —
Blows outward with the threading spume and
scatters

Wide on the air and ends in nothing at all.

And never kiss when maple seeds are plying Their tawny sails against a troubled noon, Nor when the kildeer fills the night with crying And dwindles fast into the rising moon, Lest all your silence rise with reedy laughter, Set sail and follow after.

Beneath our roof come sit and hold together The loosely woven robe of your desire, Within these walls forget to sigh and ponder And keep your kisses safe against the weather.

But come no nearer to the hemlock fire! Up this same chimney on a windy night Our love took flight.

THE INITIATES

I QUARRELED with the old dead where they were lying

Quietly under my feet,

As though when life was complete they had gone with joy to their dying,

As though they could not desire anything better than this,

The silence — the inviolable kiss.

I quarreled with them and said:
'Privet and charnel yew we have planted,
Moss rose and mignonette you shall not lack,
Your immortelle and rue you have not
wanted,

And yet you come not back, Nor lean to us, nor say, "This was the way." 'By what oath are you bound
To what cold brotherhood,
You that we loved and knew?
What vengeance could you suffer under the
ground
Darker than dissolution? Lo where we offer
Roses and yew!'

SAND

KAZAR, the nomad,
Narrowed his eyes against the swimming heat
And with his net of fancy round him sought
After the slim, elusive fish of thought.

Beneath his feet —
Between his dust-brown toes the desert stirred,
Nomad after its kind.
Spherical, blind,
The hot grains quickened and rolled.
And if they spoke at all it is not told.
But Kazar, reaching forth his hand,
Unsealed his lips and spoke unto the sand.

'Sand, sand, You who rest not Are my brother. Cloud and wind
Going before
Point our pathway.
The black rock
Has but one dwelling,
I have seen it, I who spoke with mountains.
It stands and stirs not
As a tree when no winds come.

I said to the mountain,
'Goats seek your pastures,
Olives ripen, rain lies in your valleys,
Yet must I leave you.
You look from Skyward
On many places,
But roots hold you.'

I said to the mountain,
'That most distant kingdom,
The blue country
Beyond your shadow
At the sun's setting
I go seeking.'

The sand quickened under his dust-brown heels.

The grains rolled with the sound of soundless wheels.

After a stillness Kazar spoke again, his words Hummed in the air like little drowsy birds, Hung in the air like the voice of coming rain.

'The grass was deep in the year of fat cattle, In the far land at the fork of two rivers. In the footprints of sleek-skinned oxen Lay cool water.
Wild horses came out of the mountains Proud-stepping.

Who shall sing the praise of the wild stallion? There is none like him.

Water that rushes quickly out of the hillside Is less lovely.

Snared with the twisted hemp he leapt upright —

He of my choosing. With white eyeballs He circled round me.

Terrible as the sun was the wild stallion, Lovely as moonlight.

I sat astride of his back — I, Kazar,

Like a god I sat, and swifter than flame he bore me

Out of the land at the fork of two rivers Through deep valleys. Who shall sing the praise of the wild stallion?

There is none like him. Where again shall I find him?'

Thus Kazar spoke, but the sand, too long abiding,

Leapt to the mane of the air and vanished, In a whirlwind riding.

IN A DANCE

THAT you have come to see Under all things the flesh — What does it prove? Fabric and shining knee Still intermesh, And no less slenderly fresh The dancers move.

This much at least is true
In a world of spurious wonder,
Flesh lying under
Texture and form and hue,
Wallows — and sings — and dies —
And after all beautiful things
Disconsolately cries.

Wrapped in the web of the loom For a while it shines and rejoices, But at length inclines to the voices Of the inner room.

Things we see in a dance Seem momentous and sweet — Shoulders gleam, and feet Rhythmic retreat and advance.

IMPERSONAL

RAIN falls and finds
Nothing indelible. Rain erases
Footprints of kings and the traces
Of thieves from terrace and walls
And the bright trail
That the snail leaves when he passes
Through dusty grasses.

Night rain falls
Softly in desolate places.
At the wharves' ends
Impersonally descends
On the white, desperate faces,
The gray rats, the black beams,
The yellow backs and haunches of the streams.

PORTRAIT IN OILS

A LADY drowsing in a scented room,

Contented with her cuckoo clocks and
chimes,

Her jars for creams and vials for perfume,
Her icy pitcher with its mints and limes,
On jonquil pillows in the violet gloom
Thinks neither of the tomb nor of the times.

She winds her shoulders in a silver lace.

Her limp peignoir is bangled at the knee
With seven doves embroidered on a tree
That clasps her bosom in a branched embrace.

She trails a finger overboard to trace
A hieroglyphic or a mystic Three,
I think she puts no smile upon her face
Unless she finds a stranger there to see.

Sometimes there beats upon the cushioned air A noise of fury and a voice of fears,

Sometimes without, monotonous as prayer There drips a distant harmony of tears.

She rings upon her braided rope and hears The feet of servants on the velvet stair,

And if no foes can find her but the years Indeed they will not find her unaware.

Well, let her go in any mail she may,
Who once went naked in the barbéd shower.
Let her renounce the hillside where she lay,
The bleeding yarrow and the phlox in
flower,

The hands upon her, pitiless in power,
The eyes upon her in the rising day.
Now if they brought his head upon her tray
It would divert her only for an hour.

EN ROUTE

EN ROUTE to Minneapolis
Gallipolis, Annapolis,
Or any dull metropolis,
Two trains approaching fast,
Converged and passed,
Whereon two strangers for a moment's space
Stared face to face.

And one man said, 'Alas, How like the smoke we seem, How like the wind we pass, I and this other dream.'

And one man said, 'Behold, How real a thing is this That called me even now across a cold And widening abyss!'

And the two trains sped on Slackened by no despair, With churn of piston and with clang of bells, En route from Anywhere To Somewhere Else.

HENSEL

Hensel the draughtsman plied a supple wrist With flying arc and circle counterposed, Could make a miracle with one sharp twist Of thumb and pencil.
One day
The God Mathmatikos accosted Hensel
Out of the upper air:

'Good fellow, who supposed
Such figures to exist?
Surely not I, and you must be aware
That I myself perform the chaste obstetric
That liberates contortions geometric.

'No doubt you mean no harm. But have a care! The bounds of possibility are brittle And you, I think, are stretching them a little.'

Hensel, who heard,
Took up his pencil, trimmed and lightningshod,
And made without a word
A shape so out of reason, that the god
Turned pale and fled.

Then Hensel smiled and said:
'The gods, I fear, have grown ecclesiastic.
How fortunate that space is more elastic.'

TRUTH

THE world is hollow like a pumpkin-shell, We know it well.

And warm and full of true, delightful things, Hop-o'-my-thumbs and flittermice with wings And frequent beanstalks reaching to the sky And giants nine feet high.

When with your button nose against the pane

You say, watching the rain,
'The clouds are elephants with ears like sails
And trunks to match their tails.'
Oh that is true, oh that is very true,
I see them too.

Now stop your little ears with both your thumbs

For here the Doubter comes.

And up and down he shortly will declare

'The world is dirt and skies are made of air.'

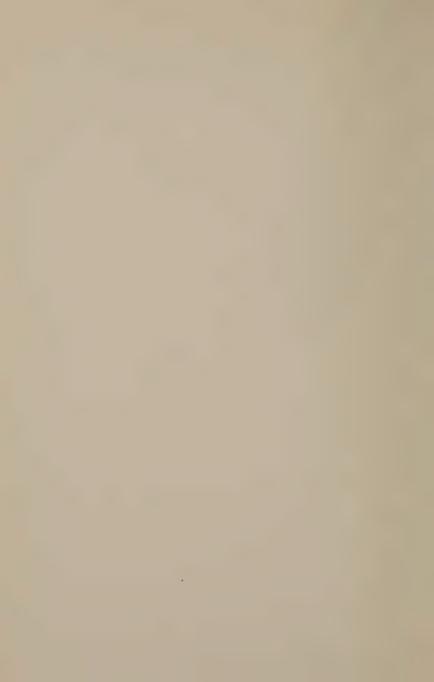
Never believe him, though he looks so wise. I marvel that his skies, Like Chicken Little's, do not tumble down And crash about his crown.

CHARM FOR SLUMBER

Come sheep, come sheep, One and two, one and two, Follow your leader, leap Over my wall. Trample my heart to sleep, One and two, one and two, Here there is work for you, Sharp feet and small.

Sorrows lie down and sleep, One and two, one and two, Standing there stark and tall. Come sheep, come sheep, Over my wall. Love that springs up anew, Love that I must not keep, One and two, one and two, Trample it deep.

Come sheep...
One and two...
Sleep.





FOOTPRINTS

Some one has gone before me here, some one With naked feet and narrow.

Among the weedy osiers and the flag-flowers gay,

Down across the brown bog the small footprints run.

Some one has gone in happiness the way That I go in sorrow.

Maybe I shall find her where the slow streams meet

Under the willows, combing out her tangled hair.

I shall come upon her maybe, unaware, Dipping her feet in the weedy shallows.

The water is clear, but her eyes in the light are clearer.

Child of no name, turn your face and shun me, Lest the bright day around you sicken and die,

Lest the stream's voice fall in the hush of the frost.

I am the dream that sometimes troubled your sky,

I am your image caught in a cloudy mirror.

Child of no name, never look upon me. Live on forever in a world that is lost.

MATHEMATICAL

With what contentment in its ordered ways
The rhomboid goes, with what assurance
fine

The parallelopiped stands on space, Fixed and definitive in every line! Here is security, precise and sweet, Since lines drawn parallel can never meet.

Curves are the road of change. The humblest peach

That ripens now and in a week decays, Hangs like the moon, as round and out of reach.

Something eludes us even while we gaze.

And common hearts get strangely out of hand,

Running on curves no compass ever planned.

EXTRA

The newsboys calling 'extra' in the night Roused me from dreams too beautiful to break.

I wrestled with my angel for the sake
Of crumbling battlement and falling light,
Of Heaven fainting from my inward sight.
Now like the newborn dead on dark I wake
While loud and loud the clamorous extras
shake

Pillar and portico to left and right.

What sudden passing sets the world agog?
Some Aged Magistrate Lays Gavel Down
Or Schooner Sinks off Newfoundland in
Fog

Or King Relinquishes his Triple Crown. Night bring him soon, whoever he may be, Sight of the Paradise you snatched from me.

HOLOCAUST

Now is the end of desire, I faint in the calm. I melt in the winter fire Like snow on a palm. Open the door for me now.
The world is lost and I go
Poor as a friar, baring my brow
To the holocaust of snow.

Sparrows know me and come Suddenly at my call.
They would not ask a crumb
Of one who has nothing at all.
Iron branches creak
And move their suppliant hands,
Winter understands
What it is that we seek —

What it is that we find
In the inclement air,
The snow-wraith — the blind
Miraculous despair.
Neither leaf nor flower
Of the uprising spring,
Neither death could bring
So beautiful an hour.

I will knock at the door
Before the day is old.
The sparrows and I will come once
more
Tremulous with cold.

Do not murmur at this
If gentle and chill I seem.
I will return you kiss for kiss
Out of a deep dream.

CREATION

I could devise as well as any
A wheeling world of weed and stone
With little houses set thereon
And puppets wheedling for a penny.

My little dogs could leap and bark, My moons arise from cloudy covers, And here and there a wooded park Would shelter crooning wayside lovers.

My huntsmen there could ride and run Pursuing momentary foxes, My little housewives in the sun Could water countless window boxes,

And little gossips gnarled and old Could sit and knit and talk of heaven And how young love grows overbold And 'God must take,' and 'God has given.'

SNOWFALL

I saw a dove alight Out of a wintry tower. Snow fell fresh and light, Rosy feet on the white Trod in the hushed hour.

Mildest of messengers,
What word from the cold skies?
He preens and stirs
A hidden knowledge blurs
His innocent gold eyes.

And in my heart is shaken A knell for all things pure, For white birds stricken, Snows that drift and blacken, Days that will not endure.

ARGUMENT

CALYX reluctant, tremble to unfurl Your red corolla to its escapade. Flowers that never open, never fade. Late frost disarms the lily of its blade And blackens where the serrate fronds uncurl, And always our impatient spirits whirl Down to oblivion in mad parade.

March on and leave me, life! I will not move, Nor mingle in your hapless miscellany, Nor bare my heart to dawnings, bleak and rainy,

Nor shed my petals on the winds of love.

I have so long and intimately known
The colours of the unexpectant dust,
Death cannot harm me now, unless I thrust
Puny insurgent arms against his throne.
And if I raise no banners to the sun,
Of what I have not, nothing can bereave
me.

March on, O ragged, bright rebellion! March on and leave me.

November points a finger at my heart — November, heavy with death.

And March reproaches me with springing juices.

All things which the creative fire fuses Envelop me in wrath. Only the grey rock and this icebound soil

Sustain my argument
And scorn fruition as a thankless toil —

Death and rebirth, pain and turmoil, And the recurrent, dull descent to earth.

But when I say that flesh has other uses
The sky upbraids me with a startled face.
The trees bend over me with anxious grieving,
'You will die, leaving
Nothing to take your place!'

Have not the stones a secret? I have heard Whispering on the summer-painted hill Out of the silence of a shrilling bird, Muttering from their muted ambuscade: 'Is it time at last?' 'Not yet, brother; lie still Until the passing of this mad parade.'

AFTER THE STORM

When the sky cleared, the frightened air, expanding,

Sparkled and swarmed again with friendly voices,

All the delightful unimportant noises
That fill the ear and fit the understanding.

The organ-grinder in a distant alley, The wet catalpa's lisp, the robin's treble, The wheel unseen against an unseen pebble, Into my heart I took them, willy-nilly.

Lulled by such pleasant pandemonium How should I hear the plaintive breath that fluttered

Where flocked a retinue of sounds unuttered

Back to their shadow-bound Elysium.

PROMPTINGS

You are not your father, though you have his eyes,

I am not my mother, though I have her way. Self in each one of us hesitates and dies, Now we are met in this important wise, What should we say?

Boldly beginning you falter and retreat, Something within us saddens and is vexed. Shadowy pitfalls open at our feet. Before I answer you my lips entreat, 'Mother, what's next?'

ON SITTING IN A TREE

Into this tree the wind climbs Tenuously, bearing fine Trailers and trumpets like a blooming vine.

Now I am wound around,

Inextricably bound

By airy tendrils to the black limbs.

Oh I would be

A deathless soul for this poor mortal tree!

See how I fit
Into the creaking elbow where I sit,
Close to the dark life and a part of it
Like dryad or like Druid,
Until my restless pulses beat no more,
Stilled by a saner fluid
Coolly replenished at the leaf's pore.
What dreams from me
Invade the startled fibers of the tree?

Is it a bird I hear or has there stirred
Up from the roots a sudden sound of fear?
As though the voiceless thing
Called upon earth to succor and defend him
Lest his new soul take wing
Cruelly, and in going cry and rend him.

ARRIVAL

THE night is a good servant And truly does adore me.

I have come to a new country But she is here before me.

With the moonlight for clear water And the wind for a broom She has swept out this hill-country And made ready my room.

MORNING SHOWER

Cool on the bosom of the waking grove The god descended in a silver rain. The blooming laurel knew the touch of Jove, Oh body indivisible, white kiss, Imperial pain! What child will come of this?

The trivial woodcock made a sacrament With syllables in priestly monotone. And while in widening pools the rumor went, The leaves adjacent to the bright event Trembled and shone.

The sun, appearing like a golden clock
Struck the conclusion of the sacred hour.
An east wind moved among the boughs and shook

The closing, pregnant flower.

THE MIRACLE

While they were locked in this Ineffable device
Before they sighed and broke
The encharméd kiss
The mantel clock spoke
Intoning twice.

And afar awoke Out of the sleeping hive Another clock that said:

'Two here — here too, Incredibly alive In a world of the dead.'

BIOGRAPHY

THERE was a man could summon without toil Beetles out of the brown wall crevices,
The horned toad and startled mantises
And dry Arachne spinning in her coil.

And whether Francis wound him in a cloak Jeweled with pity, or Merlin as some guess For whom the acorns sang, nevertheless He bent his brows upon the earth and spoke. And sparrows fell about him like a cloud — Sparrows and linnets, twittering of peace, And the tall grass sighed 'brother' at his knees

And every sapling bowed.

He walked serenely in the world of men With late adventure shining in his eyes. He died as gently as a linnet dies And spring closed round again.

THE MOTHER

SHE leans upon her window-sill to guess Her children's passing in the summer night And feels their running feet and laughter press Against her angled aureole of light.

Warm and invisible their presence seems
To-night a fragile and imperiled spark,
And pitiful the hardihood that dreams
To quench with love this wide, encroaching
dark.

Out of the barley-field a rumor comes Of grain immortal, and the pear trees swell With slow fruition, while the gourdlet drums Heavy with seed beneath her window-sill And even now her murmuring body goes Round the dark cycle with the ripening pod, The bending barley and the bee-struck rose The apple fallen in the lap of God.

THE DESCENT

Out of the height my pigeons falling Forsake their ancient sunning-place. They come like Lucifer from grace Crying and calling.

With mournful light along their wings They sink and shine in windy rings Intent on earthy offerings.

ONCE ON A TIME

Once in the days when mullein stalks were wands,

And puff-balls smoked to warm the feet of fairies,

There was a queen who ruled the lily-ponds, A king who owned the quarries.

Sweet-flag and fragrant cress were in her breath, —

Laden her arms with bud and lily stem, -

And many men had suffered boggy death For one short hour of them.

High on his cliffs the king with sly grimace Scented afar the water-weed and blossom, Nor felt the need of any queen's embrace Stir in his shaggy bosom.

'Oh, most aloof of all goat-footed kings!'
So sang the queen, 'come down across the weirs.

Why do you crave the noise of swallows' wings Forever in your ears?'

'Here in the lily-pads along the shore, What lush and amorous adventure calls! Let the stern caverns know your step no more, Descend your rocky walls.'

High tossed the quarry-king his tangled head And trod the crackling leaves with laughter harsh.

'I am not one who loves a perfumed bed, Dear lady of the marsh.'

'The little stones run rattling down the quarry,

The grass along the slopes is dry and fine.

I go to seek a maiden brown and hairy With hoofs as sharp as mine.'

'Oh, most unmannered of the horny-hearted! Oh, dull of wit!' the lily-queen replied. Yet as its first sweet succulence departed, Her passion failed and died.

And indolently leaning on the rushes

She passed the day in warm regretful tears.

But the rude king went laughing through the bushes

For years, and years, and years.

For years, and years, and years.

A YOUNG BOY

I. THE DECISION

LET him alone and when he is one year older We will send him away to school. This year he is twelve. His eyes are colder Than stars in a rainy pool.

Cold and clear. He bends his graceful head Not to our sorrow nor to any other.

Perhaps, we think, he would have loved his mother,

But his mother is dead.

notner is dead.

His round cheek is like a sun-sweetened apple And his brown throat is bare.

Is there any sorrow with which he must grapple

We would not die to share?

He will not help us. He puts his thoughts behind him,

And not of these will he speak.

He is like the waters out of Nameless Creek, Dark and still. There you may seek and find him.

There he dives like the gull, with the mill-sluice races,

His curving arm dappled with shade and sun Rises and dips, but he comes not back for our praises

When his race is done.

A child is harder to win than any lover. Let him alone, there is nothing more to say. He is young now, but when a year is over We will send him away.

II. THE OTHER WIND

THE honey locusts, heavy with rain, Swirl in the wind and splash the walk. The darkness makes forbidding talk
Outside our door, and sodden leaves come
down.

I have no quarrel with these, the rain and wind,

That tame your haughty heart and make it kind

And bring you home again.

Sprawled in your leather chair with 'West-ward Ho!'

O supple body, bright, unruly hair,
There is a wind will blow
Suddenly out of the dark, bidding you go
I cannot tell you where,

Slamming the gate on ways that you have known
Since life began,
Warping you to the stature of a man
With bulk of sinew and bone.

Just now while still your mind
Thrilled to the prowess of Amyas Leigh
Crowning with worship his heroic form,
Why did you raise your startled eyes to me?
Was it because you heard above the storm
The awful rising of that other wind?

BOUNDARIES

I sometimes think the boundaries of a land Most real when human thought has set them so,

Though clover rooted in New Hampshire grow

Seed in Vermont, though children hand in hand

Walk the dividing line to school and stand
One in Nevada, one in Idaho,
Yet since man's mind has willed it, let them
go,

Keen as a watershed, clean as a brand.

For you and I have felt division wrought Between us by the bright, imperious blade And know too well how boundaries of thought Stand as in stone and will not be gainsayed And how abashed before that airy line Must fall away forever your heart and mine.

ON A HILLSIDE

I sat in sorrow through an autumn day When first our love was drawing to its close. I sat in silence while around me lay The rain-ripe berries of the bramble-rose Bitter and bright and destined for decay, And a faint swallow bent its wings my way For the last time fleeing the winter snows.

I said, 'Oh, passion tenuous as breath Forsake me now, since all things else depart!'

While bird and leaf and berry came to death I marvelled at the autumn in my heart.

AN OLD TALE

Dead Helen lies in peace But the Night cannot forget. Her heart has found release But the Wind remembers yet And the Night cannot forget A night in Greece.

The Wind remembers yet
Soft curls most lightly blown,
Soft feet in upland grasses
Slenderly set,
Beauty that stirs the waters as she passes.
These hath the Wind known.
For these the Wind makes moan.

The Wind remembers well
White sails upon the blue Ægean flying,
White gulls, wheeling and crying,
Remembers well
The Trojan shores low-lying,
The salt spray and the light
And the wild flight,—
Of these the Wind can tell.

Dead Helen lies in peace
But the Wind repeats the tale
Of ships that scudding sail
Out of the Isles of Greece.
Ships that flee or give chase
All are as one.
Over her sleeping face
No memories quiver.
But the Wind moans on and on
And the Night will grieve forever.

DEFENDERS OF DEATH

Since we have sworn allegiance to a shadow The light invading finds us unaware. Backs to the rising dawn we glower and stare. Oh, lineage of night! Seed of despair! How traitorously the red pomegranate hid you!

Now on the river slope the cloudy plum Breaks whitely, and the quince and cherry flower;

Out of their fragrance innocent fruits will come,

But we must gnaw the dangerous, rosy rind, Impatient for the core.

Aloof we sit in a circle, with Death at the center,

And gaze on Nothing until our eyes are blind. We look on Nothing with a resolute mind Until our dry hearts rattle like boughs in the winter,

Stark on a desolate air.

Death is so feeble, so encompassed round. An island king, upon whose sandy shore The living sea beats with recurrent roar.

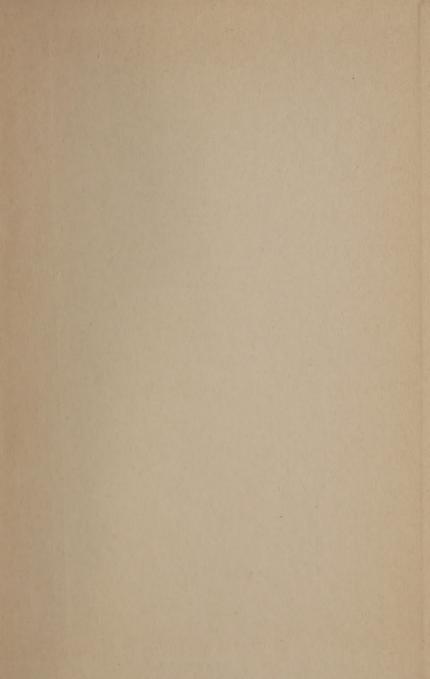
Oh bend and hear the piteous April sound Where in his final fortress of the ground He groans and labors for his lost estate.

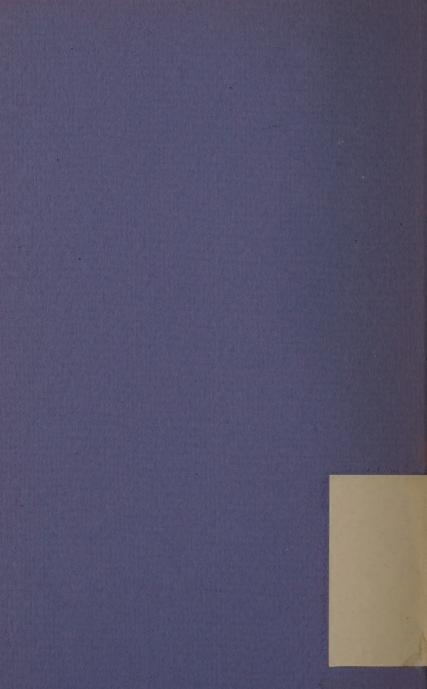
Life on the ramparts now! Life at the gate!

And we have sworn allegiance to a name, A scattering smoke, a faggot in the flame.









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